

THE TRANSFORMATION OF RELIGIOUS PRACTICES OF DIGITAL UMMAH IN THE AGE OF ALGORITHMS

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ABSTRACT

The study examines the formation of new religious authorities within the Cyber Islamic Ummah, configured by social media algorithms. Through a one-month qupesalitative approach, the research focused on the analysis of viral religious content on TikTok, YouTube, and Instagram by applying the theoretical framework of Digital Ummah and Cyber Islamic Environments (CIEs). Data were collected through observation of the top 30 videos on each platform, in-depth interviews with five ulama (traditional Islamic scholars) and five digital influencers, as well as audience interaction analysis (likes, shares, and comments), which were then analyzed thematically. The findings reveal new religious practices among digital users, characterized by the dominance of short da'wah content (15-60 seconds) on TikTok and Instagram Reels, which yields an engagement rate 3-5 times higher than long-form content. This reality leads to the simplification of complex religious material into a sound bite that loses crucial nuance. The themes of prohibiting heresy (32%), criticizing modern lifestyle (25%), and practical worship guides (18%) dominate, reconfiguring the hierarchy of religious authority where digital popularity outweighs the depth of knowledge. Although Cyber Islamic Environments, as a hybrid space, democratize access to religious knowledge, there is a risk of fragmentation of understanding, shallowness of meaning, and intolerance. The study recommends strategic collaboration among scholars, content creators, digital platforms, and regulators through the transformation of da'wah formats, enhancing digital literacy, and drafting ethical guidelines to create a healthy digital da'wah ecosystem while preserving the authenticity of traditional scientific teachings and authorities.

Keywords: Digital Ummah Cyber Islamic Environments (CIE), Religious Practices, Social Media Algorithm

INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of social media, communication platforms, and religious apps has revolutionized the way global Muslims interact, share knowledge, and build collective identities online (Paisal, 2021). Phenomenon *Ummah Digital* Muslim communities connected through technology include not only conventional da'wah activities, but also social movements, digital sharia economy, and platform-based political mobilization (Raya, 2025; Wael and Reda, 2025). Indonesia has a significant influence on social media, with a large portion of its population actively engaged on various platforms. As of January 2020, Indonesia had 160 million social media users, representing a 12 million increase from the previous year (Saputra et al., 2023). This number continues to grow until it reaches 167 million users in January 2023 or around 60% of the total population (Saputra et al., 2023; Halim et al., 2024; Nugraha et al., 2024).

The biggest challenge in the digital age is the emergence of a new religious authority. Digital religious authorities often stand out for their ability to engage and communicate effectively online, bypassing traditional religious leadership paths (Campbell, 2022). This shift challenges conventional views of religious authority, which are usually based on hierarchical and institutional structures (Andok, 2024). The digital environment enables users to select which religious authorities to follow, making them more customizable and personalized. Users can decide when and how to interact with religious content, resulting in a more individualized religiosity experience.

The digital world enables a more personalized approach to religious practices, allowing users to select which aspects of religious authority to follow and for how long. This customization of religious engagement challenges the more

rigid structure of traditional religious authority (Fakhrurroji, 2025). While digital media can undermine traditional religious authority by offering alternative sources of knowledge and influence, it can also enhance the authority of traditional leaders who adapt to these new communication practices. For example, some religious leaders have successfully integrated digital media into their practices, thereby maintaining or even increasing their authority (Wael and Reda, 2025).

In the Indonesian context, the two largest moderate Islamic organizations in Indonesia, NU and Muhammadiyah, have given different responses to the emergence of new digital religious authorities. Muhammadiyah takes a more accepting stance, while NU is more reactive, highlighting the tension between maintaining traditional authority and adapting to the new digital reality (Akmaliah, 2020). Digital spaces present both opportunities and threats to traditional religious organizations (Rahmah et al., 2025). While providing a platform for wider engagement and visibility, it also poses the risk of marginalizing traditional voices if they don't adapt to the new digital environment (Tabti, 2022). In addition, there is also potential for Religious Hoaxes, Polarization of identity politics, and Commodification of religion, which turns da'wah into a market commodity (Thursday, 2021).

The Internet has democratized access to Islamic knowledge, but it has also eroded traditional hierarchies of authority. It enables a global audience to consult religious texts, attend virtual religious services, and participate in online discussions (Salleh et al., 2022; Solahudin and Fakhrurroji, 2020). Traditional Islamic pedagogy and the authority of scholars ('ulamā') are currently facing a significant challenge from the rise of self-taught learning driven by the Internet. This shift is unambiguously redrawing religious authority, as lay Muslims now forcefully step into religious discourse and

interpretation (Hamdeh, 2020). Previously, religious authority was held by Islamic boarding school scholars or institutions, such as the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI). Now, there is an "instant ustadz" with a large follower base, but the depth of their knowledge is questionable. Social media algorithms exacerbate this situation by prioritizing content that is emotionally charged or provocative. The preference of young Indonesian Muslims for social media fatwas over MUI fatwas is a reflection of a broader trend in the fragmentation of religious authorities and the emergence of digital platforms as the primary source of religious guidance. This shift is driven by the increased connectedness and accessibility of social media influencers, the rise of digital literacy among young people, and the dynamic nature of online religious discourse (Febrian, 2024; Laugu, et al., 2024; Rahman 2022). The traditional religious authority held by organizations such as Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) is being challenged by minor ustadz and other online religious figures. This shift is partly due to the accessibility and appeal of social media platforms (Akmaliah, 2020).

This study examines the transformation of religious authority in the Indonesian Cyber Islamic Ummah, where social media algorithms radically form a new hierarchy by elevating viral da'wah content—which often prioritizes emotional appeal over depth of knowledge—as the primary source of authority. An algorithmic logic that prioritizes engagement has given birth to distinctive digital religious practices: the fragmentation of authority (from Islamic scholars to digital influencers), the shift in people's preferences from in-depth studies to instant content, and the commodification of da'wah that transforms religious messages into commodities subject to viralization mechanisms and digital markets. This phenomenon not only reconfigures the way people interact with

religion but also challenges the authenticity of Islamic teachings in a digital space dominated by clicks and sensational logic. This study presents a critical perspective on how the algorithmic era is transforming the contemporary Islamic landscape, while also highlighting the risk of reducing religious meaning to mere entertainment content that loses its spiritual and intellectual depth.

Literature Review

Gary Bunt introduced the concepts of the "Digital Ummah" and "Cyber Islamic Environments" (CIEs) to examine the intersection of Islam and digital technology. He explores how contemporary digital technologies influence both the practice and interpretation of Islam in modern society. Cyber Islamic Environments (CIEs) refer to digital spaces where Islamic content is created, shared, and consumed. This includes websites, social media platforms, applications, and other digital tools that promote the dissemination of Islamic teachings and practices. Increasing digital influences, apps, and social networks have become a significant source of information for many Muslims, shaping a contemporary understanding of Islam (Bunt 2024).

Cyber Ummah, also known as "cyberum," is a transnational and digital Muslim community that exists in the global cyberspace. This concept highlights the formation of a global Muslim brotherhood facilitated by digital communication. The internet has redefined religious authority and expertise, allowing for the emergence of new figures, such as "cyber priests". These digital religious leaders utilize online platforms to engage in da'wah and establish their religious authority. Cybercriminals influence social relations and cultural identity, especially among Muslims in the diaspora. The virtual community helps them maintain contact with their hometown and integrate

into the new society (Ibrahim, 2024; Thursday, 2021).

Gary Bunt's theory of Digital Ummah and the Cyber Islamic Environment provides a comprehensive framework for understanding how digital technologies are reshaping Islamic practices, authorities, and communities. This theory highlights the dynamic interplay between tradition and modernity in the digital age, offering insights into the ever-evolving contemporary Islamic landscape.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework in this study examines the transformation of religious authority within *Ummah Digital* Indonesia, which is shaped by the algorithmic logic of social media. Digital platforms have democratized access to Islamic knowledge while disrupting traditional religious hierarchies. Influencers and viral content are now competing with established Islamic scholars, creating a fragmented authority structure where emotional appeal often trumps scholarly depth. This shift reflects a broader trend of digital religiosity, where engagement metrics prioritize sensationalism over substance, redefining the way Muslims interact with religious teachings (Bunt, 2024). The framework highlights the tension between traditional religious institutions and new digital authorities, emphasizing the role of algorithms in shaping contemporary Islamic discourse.

The core concept in this framework is Gary Bunt's Cyber Islamic Environments (CIEs), which describe digital spaces where Islamic content is created, shared, and consumed. This environment encompasses social media, apps, and websites that facilitate religious engagement, often circumventing traditional religious structures. The advent of digital platforms has enabled new religious authorities—such as "cyber priests"—to gain influence through viral content rather than formal theological

training (Bunt 2024; Ibrahim 2024). This phenomenon poses a significant challenge to traditional religious institutions such as NU and Muhammadiyah, compelling them to adapt in order to maintain relevance. Thus, this framework explores how digital mediation is reconfiguring religious authority, prioritizing accessibility and virality over traditional scholarly credentials.

Another important aspect is the Digital Ummah, a transnational Muslim community connected through digital networks. This concept shows how online interaction shapes a global Islamic identity while also dividing religious authorities. Social media algorithms amplify certain voices, often prioritizing charismatic influencers over established traditional Islamic scholars. In Indonesia, this has led to a preference for instant and emotional religious content over in-depth studies, raising concerns about the commodification of religion (Akmaliah, 2020; Khamis, 2021). This framework examines how these dynamics affect religious authenticity, where digital platforms prioritize engagement over theological depth, potentially reducing Islamic teachings to marketable content.

Finally, the framework addresses the paradox of digital religious authority: on the one hand, technology empowers new voices, but on the other hand, it risks eroding traditional Islamic scholarly authority. Algorithms tend to promote viral content that may be superficial, resulting in superficial engagement with religion. Meanwhile, traditional leaders who adapt to digital communication can retain their influence, demonstrating the complex interplay between innovation and tradition (Wael & Reda, 2025). By analyzing these dynamics, the conceptual framework provides critical insights into how digitalization is redefining Islamic authority, community, and practice in contemporary Indonesia.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach, conducted within one month, focusing on the analysis of viral religious content on the TikTok, YouTube, and Instagram platforms. Data collection was carried out through: (1) observation of popular da'wah content (at least the top 30 videos of each platform), (2) short but in-depth interviews with 10 speakers (5 traditional scholars and five digital influencers), and (3) audience interaction analysis (likes, shares, comments) on selected content. The research is focused on understanding how a platform's algorithm over a period of one month can elevate or drown a religious authority (Rofiqoh and Zulhawati, 2020).

During a one-month observation period, the data were analyzed using a thematic approach to identify the patterns of da'wah content that the algorithm was most interested in. The researcher compared the content performance of traditional scholars versus digital influencers in terms of *engagement rate*, show duration, and the pattern of recommendations between content. The analysis also examined the consistency of the themes raised and the communication strategies employed by each group. The results of this study are expected to provide a preliminary overview of the mechanism of forming religious authority in the digital space within a short but intensive period of time (Alim and Lailisna, 2022).

DISCUSSION

Viral Da'wah Content Patterns on Social Media

Based on one month of research on da'wah content on digital platforms, a dominant pattern was found that can be presented in the following table:

Table 1. The Dominant Da'wah Content Pattern on Digital Platforms

No	Analysis Aspect	Key Findings	Additional Details
1	Content Format	Short content (15-60 seconds) on TikTok/Instagram Reels	3-5× higher engagement rate vs long content on YouTube
2	Content Themes	1. Prohibition of the practice of bid'ah (32%) 2. Criticism of modern lifestyle (25%) 3. Motivation for practical worship (18%)	• Total covers 75% of the content observed • The remaining 25% is a mixed theme

Source : Researcher Observation Results on Digital Platforms

This study reveals the phenomenon of the dominance of short content, with a duration of 15-60 seconds, on the TikTok and Instagram Reels platforms in the dissemination of Islamic religious content. These findings show that short content has an engagement rate 3-5 times higher than long-form content on YouTube. This dominance is inseparable from the way social media platform algorithms are designed, specifically to encourage content with high retention rates. The retention rate of 85% for short content, far exceeding the 45% for long content, is clear proof of how the platform's algorithm has created an ecosystem that strongly supports short content formats.

This algorithmic mechanism works in several ways. First, the platform gives higher priority to content that can retain viewers until the end (high completion rate). Second, automated recommendation systems tend to downgrade content that is heavily skipped before completion. Third, the platform provides incentives in the form of increased organic reach for creators who consistently produce short content with a high retention rate. This phenomenon creates a positive feedback cycle where short content receives more exposure, which in turn encourages more creators to adopt similar formats.

The implications of the dominance of this short content are significant in the world of digital da'wah. On the one hand, this format enables a faster and broader dissemination of religious messages. However, on the other hand, there are concerns that the complexity of religious material may be reduced to mere soundbites or short pieces, losing their original context. Digital preachers now face the challenge of delivering material that typically requires lengthy and in-depth explanations in a concise format, often having to choose between the accuracy of the material and the algorithmic appeal.

Thematic analysis of viral da'wah content showed three dominant themes that collectively accounted for 75% of all observed content. The theme "prohibition of the practice of heresy" emerged as the most popular, with a percentage of 32%. Several factors can explain the popularity of this theme. First, material on heresy is relatively easy to understand in a concise format because it often only requires an explanation of what is considered to deviate from standard practice. Second, this theme naturally triggers high engagement because it causes pros and cons in the comment column, which is actually considered a positive signal by the platform's algorithm.

The second dominant theme is "criticism of modern lifestyle" with a percentage of 25%. Content related to this theme often uses examples of viral cases or widespread phenomena as an entry point to convey criticism from a religious perspective. For example, specific fashion trends, consumer behaviors, or hedonistic lifestyles are often used as subjects for discussion and analysis. This approach is practical because it connects religious values with actual issues being discussed, thereby increasing the relevance and attractiveness of the content.

The third theme that is quite prominent is "practical worship motivation" with a percentage of 18%. This type of content typically includes a

brief guide on worship procedures, daily prayers, or tips for enhancing the quality of worship. The great thing about this theme is that it is practical and instantly applicable, making it a perfect fit for short content formats. The remaining 25% of content consists of a variety of mixed themes that are not dominant enough to form a specific pattern.

The dominance of short content and preference for specific themes in digital da'wah carry several important implications that need to be considered. The first implication is the tendency to simplify complex religious material. Many aspects of Islamic teachings that require a lengthy explanation with various nuances must now be condensed into very short content. This simplification risks resulting in a superficial understanding or even distortion of meaning, as it removes important supporting context and explanations.

The second implication is the potential for misinterpretation of religious doctrine due to duration restrictions. When material that should require a comprehensive explanation is forced into a format of 60 seconds or less, there is a high likelihood of a reduction or even a change in meaning. For example, explanations of heresy, which should take into account various sects and historical contexts, may be reduced to a mere list of prohibitions without adequate explanation. This has the potential to create a rigid and intolerant understanding of the diversity of religious practices.

The third implication is a change in the way people consume religious knowledge. If people previously learned about religion through lengthy recitations or thick books, now the tendency is to switch to short content that is more like snacks than a main course. This shift has the potential to alter the mindset and understanding of religion, shifting from comprehensive and profound to partial and instantaneous.

The fourth implication is a change in the hierarchy of religious authority. In a short content format, factors such as personal charisma, visual communication skills, and understanding of algorithms are often more important than the depth of religious knowledge possessed. This has the potential to shift religious authority from scholars who are deeply knowledgeable to figures who are more knowledgeable about using social media, regardless of their scientific capacity.

Table 2. Content Performance Comparison

Platform	Average Duration	Engagement Rate	Dominant Topics
TikTok	35 seconds	8.7%	Prohibition of bid'ah
Instagram Reels	42 seconds	7.2%	Lifestyle criticism
YouTube	12 minutes	2.1%	Motivation for worship

Source : Researcher Observation Results on Digital Platforms

The table above illustrates how digital platform algorithms have significantly altered the landscape of da'wah and religious authority in Indonesia. Analysis of the most popular content on TikTok, Instagram Reels, and YouTube shows that algorithms tend to prioritize content with specific characteristics, such as provocative headlines that use the words "haram" or "danger," thumbnails with dramatic facial expressions, and the use of popular hashtags such as #dakwahsunnah and #hijrah. This pattern creates an ecosystem where short content, typically 15-60 seconds in length, dominates, with an engagement rate 3-5 times higher than that of long content. However, it often comes at the expense of the material's depth.

The finding of the study reveals a striking difference between the approaches of traditional scholars and digital influencers in delivering religious materials. Traditional islamic tend to maintain classic formats with formal language and references to yellow books. At the same time, digital influencers are

more adept at capitalizing on algorithm-preferred slang, memes, and pop culture analogies. This transformation has given rise to a new hierarchy of authority in the world of digital da'wah, where popularity is measured by the number of followers and the ability to produce viral content, often displacing the authority of traditional islamic scholars who possess a stronger scientific basis but are less digitally literate.

The platform's algorithmic mechanisms create a viralization cycle that reinforces specific authority through a recommendation system that tends to limit users in the "echo chamber" of similar content. Content that sparks debate and high engagement gains wider organic reach, while the consistency of daily posts provides an automatic algorithmic boost. This phenomenon has given rise to the practice of commodifying religious knowledge through paid membership systems, product sponsorships, and direct monetization through platform features.

The social implications of this transformation are profound. On the one hand, there is a democratization of access to religious knowledge; on the other hand, there is a risk of simplifying complex material into soundbites that lose their context. The shift in authority criteria from the depth of knowledge to the ability of digital presentation poses new challenges in maintaining the authenticity of teachings. This research highlights the need for a prudent approach from various stakeholders, including traditional scholars who must enhance their digital literacy, platforms that should develop algorithms more responsibly, and governments that should develop comprehensive digital da'wah ethics guidelines (Adinugraha et al., 2025). The future of religious authorities in the digital age will be determined primarily by their ability to navigate these complexities while maintaining a balance between technological adaptation and the

preservation of authentic religious substance.

Clustering of Variables

An analysis of three major social media platforms reveals a consistent pattern where content duration is inversely proportional to engagement rates. TikTok emerges as the platform with the shortest content yet the highest engagement, recording an average duration of 35 seconds with an engagement rate of 8.7%. This ultra-short format proves effective in maintaining viewer retention and promoting content virality, though it leads to the oversimplification of complex religious materials. The platform's algorithmic characteristics tend to prioritize dense, repetitive, and easily digestible content within a short timeframe.

Instagram Reels occupies a middle position with an average content duration of 42 seconds and an engagement rate of 7.2%. This platform leverages visual strength, supported by music and effects, making it ideal for delivering socially critical messages rooted in religion. Its ability to connect religious values with trending widespread phenomena serves as its main attraction for young audiences. This visually appealing format creates a hybrid space where moral messages are packaged in entertaining forms without losing relevance to contemporary contexts.

In contrast to the previous two platforms, YouTube exhibits opposing characteristics, with an average content duration of 12 minutes but a 2.1% engagement rate. This platform enables a deeper exploration of themes and nuanced explanations, although it must contend with limitations in organic reach. Long-form content on YouTube provides space for more comprehensive discussions, despite facing the reality that such formats are less competitive in terms of virality compared to short-form content on other platforms.

The dominance of specific themes on each platform demonstrates how technical characteristics influence the development of religious discourse. TikTok is dominated by discussions of bid'ah (religious innovation) prohibitions that lend themselves to firm and dogmatic statement formats. In contrast, Instagram Reels more frequently raises criticisms of modern lifestyles relevant to young audiences. YouTube serves as a container for practical worship motivation content that requires more detailed explanations. This pattern indicates a reciprocal relationship between algorithmic preferences and the selection of themes deemed worthy of discussion.

This transformation reconfigures traditional religious authority hierarchies, where the ability to adapt to digital platform logic becomes a new determining factor in shaping these hierarchies. Creators who understand the viral mechanisms of each platform tend to gain more attention than religious scholars with strong academic foundations but limited digital literacy. This situation demands new approaches in responding to changes in the digital preaching landscape, requiring consideration of each platform's specific characteristics while maintaining the substantive quality of religious materials.

The Transformation of Religious Practices of Digital Ummah in the Age of Algorithms

TikTok and Instagram Reels have given rise to new religious practices that are fundamentally different from conventional Islamic scholarly traditions. This phenomenon not only changes the way people consume religious knowledge but also establishes a new paradigm for understanding religious authority, methods of message delivery, and the priority themes deemed worthy of discussion. Based on one month of research, it was found that content with a duration of 15-60 seconds had an engagement rate 3-5 times

higher than long content on YouTube. This indicates that platform algorithms have become a significant determinant in shaping digital religious practices, where retention rates and the ability to hold audience attention are more important than the depth of material or scientific validity.

One of the most obvious implications of this phenomenon is the reduction of complex religious material into brief soundbites. Islamic teachings, traditionally understood through lengthy studies, in-depth discussions, and references to classical texts, must now be condensed into 35- to 60-second formats to compete in the digital space. This simplification has the potential to eliminate important nuances in religious understanding, such as historical context, sectarian differences, or philosophical explanations behind a law. For example, the theme of "prohibition of the practice of *bid'ah*," which dominates 32% of digital da'wah content, is often conveyed in the form of a list of prohibitions without a comprehensive explanation of why a practice is considered heretical, how scholars differ about it, or what the social consequences of the ban are. As a result, the religious understanding of digital umpires tends to be black and white, less tolerant of diverse interpretations, and prone to oversimplification.

Additionally, the platform's algorithm has also altered the hierarchy of religious authority. If previously religious authority was determined by the depth of knowledge, scientific sanad, or mastery of classical texts, now popularity on social media has become a new measure. A dai who can produce viral content with an attractive communication style, provocative thumbnails, and strategic hashtag selection can be more influential than traditional scholars who master reference books but are less digitally literate (Azka et al., 2024). This shift creates a new dynamic in which the capacity of entertainers and the understanding of algorithms are often

valued more than the acumen of religious analysis. In fact, some religious influencers are now adopting content strategies similar to digital celebrities, such as leveraging clickbait, sparking controversy, or following popular trends to increase engagement.

The themes that dominate digital da'wah content also reflect the preferences of algorithms and audiences. The themes of "modern lifestyle criticism" (25%) and "practical worship motivation" (18%) gained popularity because they were easy to package in a concise format and relevant to everyday life. However, themes such as Islamic philosophy, Sufism, or socio-religious studies that require deepening are not given a place. As a result, there is an inequality in digital religious discourse where issues of an instant and emotional nature are discussed more often. At the same time, in-depth discussions about social justice, interfaith relations, or global ethics are marginalized.

This new practice also gave rise to the phenomenon of religious commodification, where religious knowledge is no longer just conveyed as a form of da'wah but is also utilized for commercial purposes. Many religious content creators utilize the platform's monetization features, product sponsorships, or paid memberships to access exclusive content. On the one hand, this can serve as an incentive for Dai to continue producing high-quality content. However, on the other hand, there is a risk that religious materials will be adjusted to market tastes to make a profit, no longer based on the needs of the ummah or the depth of knowledge.

This shift also affects the way people interact with religion. Whereas religious knowledge was previously acquired through regular recitations, discussions with *kiai*, or reading books, many people now rely on short-form content as their primary source of religious understanding. This has the potential to create a generation of Muslims who are used to instant

religious understanding, less critical, and easily influenced by populist narratives. Furthermore, social media algorithms tend to form an "echo chamber" that exposes users to only one perspective, reinforcing narrow fanaticism and reducing the space for dialogue between views.

Then, what is the future of religious practice in this digital era? The greatest challenge is finding a balance between adapting technology and maintaining the authenticity of teaching. Traditional scholars need to enhance their digital literacy in order to effectively compete in the online space without compromising the depth of their material (Paisal, 2021). On the other hand, digital religious influencers must be more responsible in delivering content, not only pursuing virality but also ensuring accuracy and maintaining the integrity of context. Social media platforms also need to develop algorithms that not only drive engagement but also prioritize quality and in-depth content.

The formation of new religious practices in the digital era is inevitable, but it must be accompanied by critical awareness so that religion does not lose its substance and meaning. When appropriately managed, digital media can be a powerful da'wah tool. However, if left unattended, it is feared that it will give birth to a generation that understands religion partially, superficially, and is vulnerable to manipulation. Therefore, collaboration between scholars, academics, regulators, and content creators is crucial to ensuring that digital transformation in the world of da'wah remains on a healthy and equitable path.

Cyber Islamic Environments as a Hybrid Space

Digital da'wah has created a hybrid space where Islamic values meet the algorithmic logic of social media, resulting in a distinctive new form of religious communication. This phenomenon not only alters the way religious messages are conveyed but also impacts the way people

engage with religious teachings. Based on research on da'wah content on digital platforms, it can be observed that the short format (15-60 seconds) dominates, with an engagement rate 3-5 times higher than long-form content on YouTube. This indicates that the platform's algorithm has created an ecosystem that prioritizes high retention, favoring short content with an 85% completion rate over in-depth content that achieves only a 45% completion rate. This mechanism creates a positive feedback cycle: short content gets more exposure, which in turn encourages more creators to adopt similar formats. By implication, complex religious messages are often forced to be simplified into short pieces, thereby losing the nuance and context that should be integral to a comprehensive understanding of religion.

The dominance of this short content is inseparable from the three main themes that dominate digital da'wah: the prohibition of heretical practices (32%), criticism of modern lifestyles (25%), and practical motivation for worship (18%). These themes were chosen because of their ability to trigger high engagement, both through controversy and relevance to actual issues. For example, content about heresy tends to spark debate in the comment column, which is actually considered a positive signal by the algorithm. Meanwhile, criticism of the modern lifestyle often uses the viral phenomenon as an entrance to convey religious messages, thereby increasing the appeal of the content. On the other hand, practical worship motivational content relies on practicality and ease of application, making it suitable for a short format. However, the dominance of these themes also indicates a narrowing of broader religious discourse to some of the topics considered "best-selling" in the digital market.

This shift not only affected the way religious material was delivered but also changed the hierarchy of religious authority. In the digital space, personal

charisma, visual communication skills, and algorithmic understanding often determine the popularity of a preacher more than the depth of their religious knowledge. As a result, new figures have emerged who may not have a strong religious or scientific background but are adept at utilizing the mechanism of social media viralization. Meanwhile, traditional scholars who rely on classical approaches—such as lengthy recitations or references to the Yellow Book—sometimes lose out in terms of reach. This change creates a new dynamic in which religious authority is no longer solely determined by science, but also by adaptability to the logic of digital platforms.

The social implications of this phenomenon are complex and multifaceted. On the one hand, digital da'wah has democratized access to religious knowledge, allowing more people to be exposed to religious messages without time and space limitations. However, on the other hand, there is a risk of simplifying religious teachings, which can lead to a superficial or even distorted understanding of them. When religious material that requires in-depth explanation is condensed into 60 seconds of content, there is a high risk of misinterpretation or loss of important context. For example, an explanation of heresy that should take into account the diversity of sects and historical context might be reduced to a mere list of prohibitions without adequate argumentation. This has the potential to trigger an attitude of intolerance towards the diversity of religious practices, as the audience only receives partial information without a complete understanding (Pamungkas, Suleman, and Santoso, 2024).

Additionally, social media algorithms often create "echo chambers," where users are only exposed to content that reinforces their own beliefs. This mechanism can exacerbate polarization within the Muslim community, where

dissent is no longer seen as a treasure of scholarship but rather as a threat to be eliminated. Provocative content with titles such as "This is the Practice of Bid'ah that Is Still Widely Done!" or "Modern Lifestyle Plunges into Hell" is more likely to go viral because it triggers emotions, but often ignores a more dialogical and inclusive approach.

Behind this transformation, there is also the practice of commodification of religious knowledge, where da'wah content is not only a medium for disseminating knowledge but also a monetized commodity. Many digital preachers are leveraging their popularity to offer paid programs, merchandise, or product sponsorships. While this is legitimate, concerns exist that the market logic could shift the orientation of da'wah from education to entertainment or even the exploitation of sensationalism.

In this context, Cyber Islamic Environments become a hybrid space where religious values intersect with the capitalistic logic of social media. This space is not entirely autonomous, but is shaped by the battle between da'wah interests, the audience's desire for entertaining content, and the algorithmic mechanisms that drive viralization. The digital ummah is also divided between the desire to access religious knowledge virtually and the need to understand Islam in depth. The challenge ahead is to strike a balance between technological adaptation and maintaining the integrity of religious messages, while ensuring that scientific authority remains the foundation of digital da'wah. Without this effort, it is feared that religion will only become a mere entertainment commodity, losing its depth and relevance as a holistic guide to life.

Practical Implications and Recommendations

The findings of this study provide urgent practical implications for the implementation of religious guidance and services in Indonesia. Religious

institutions, ranging from the Ministry of Religious Affairs and MUI to mass organizations such as NU and Muhammadiyah, need to proactively adapt by transforming the da'wah format. They must be able to produce concise content that is both engaging and easy to understand, without sacrificing the depth and authenticity of the teaching material. In addition, a program to increase digital literacy for traditional scholars and da'i is necessary so that they are not displaced by influencers who have a limited knowledge base. Another implication is the need for systematic efforts to prevent misunderstandings through official guidelines on the ethics of preaching on social media.

This transformation of religious authority cannot be separated from the socio-cultural context and local religious policy of Indonesia. Socio-culturally, Indonesia's religious society, which has a very high level of social media penetration, is a fertile ground for instant and superficial religious understanding, which has the potential to trigger intolerance and polarization. In terms of policy, the responses of the two largest Islamic organizations, NU and Muhammadiyah, which range from reactive to adaptive, reflect the tension in responding to these changes. These findings highlight the need for religious policies that not only govern the real world but also the digital space, by encouraging collaboration and ensuring that traditional scientific authorities retain a place in the new da'wah ecosystem.

To create a healthy digital da'wah ecosystem, a detailed and synergistic collaboration strategy among all stakeholders is necessary. Scholars and religious organizations must open themselves up by creating da'wah materials that are ready to be adapted to digital formats and verify the content of creators. On the other hand, content creators need to be responsible by avoiding sensationalism and actively collaborating with scholars to ensure the accuracy of the

material. Digital platforms have a huge responsibility to develop algorithms that not only pursue engagement but also prioritize and flag content that has been verified for accuracy. Meanwhile, regulators, in this case the government, must facilitate regular meetings between parties and issue comprehensive digital da'wah ethics guidelines as a common foundation.

CLOSING

Themes such as the prohibition of bid'ah (32%), criticism of modern lifestyles (25%), and practical motivation for worship (18%) dominated because of their ability to trigger high levels of interaction. However, they risk reducing a deep understanding of Islam. This shift is altering the hierarchy of religious authority, where digital popularity often supersedes the depth of knowledge, creating a new dynamic in which an entertainer's abilities and algorithmic understanding are valued more highly than authentic religious knowledge.

Cyber Islamic Environments have emerged as a hybrid space where Islamic values intersect with the capitalist logic of social media, resulting in a distinctive form of da'wah but vulnerable to simplification and commodification. On the one hand, this space democratizes access to religious knowledge, but on the other hand, it risks triggering superficial, intolerant, and fragmented understandings due to algorithmic echo chambers. The challenge ahead is to balance technological adaptation with maintaining the integrity of religious messages, ensuring that scientific authority remains the foundation, while utilizing the potential of digital media for inclusive and quality da'wah, without the collective efforts of scholars, content creators, and platforms, religion in the digital space risks being reduced to an entertainment commodity that loses its spiritual and intellectual substance.

The findings of this study provide urgent practical implications for the implementation of religious guidance and services in Indonesia. Religious institutions, ranging from the Ministry of Religious Affairs and MUI to mass organizations such as NU and Muhammadiyah, need to proactively adapt by transforming the da'wah format. They must be able to produce concise content that is both engaging and easy to understand, without compromising the depth and authenticity of the teaching material. In addition, a program to increase digital literacy for traditional scholars and da'i is necessary so that they are not displaced by influencers who have a limited knowledge base. Another implication is the need for systematic efforts to prevent misunderstandings through official guidelines on the ethics of preaching on social media.

This transformation of religious authority cannot be separated from the socio-cultural context and local religious policy of Indonesia. Socio-culturally, Indonesia's religious society, which has a very high level of social media penetration, is a fertile ground for instant and superficial religious understanding, which has the potential to trigger intolerance and polarization. In terms of policy, the responses of the two largest Islamic organizations, NU and Muhammadiyah, which are different—from reactive to adaptive—reflect the tension in responding to these changes. These findings highlight the need for religious policies that not only govern the real world but also the digital space, by encouraging collaboration and ensuring that traditional scientific authorities retain a place in the new da'wah ecosystem.

To create a healthy digital da'wah ecosystem, a detailed and synergistic collaboration strategy among all stakeholders is necessary. Scholars and religious organizations must open themselves up by creating da'wah materials that are ready to be adapted to

digital formats and verify the content of creators. On the other hand, content creators need to be responsible by avoiding sensationalism and actively collaborating with scholars to ensure the accuracy of the material. Digital platforms bear a significant responsibility to design algorithms that not only optimize user engagement but also prioritize content verified for accuracy and actively flag misinformation. Meanwhile, regulators, in this case the government, must facilitate regular meetings between parties and issue comprehensive digital da'wah ethics guidelines as a common foundation.

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